

Feathers

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Category: Halo

Genre: Drama, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2013-07-08 04:13:41

Updated: 2013-07-08 04:13:41

Packaged: 2016-04-27 04:21:55

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,551

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The Covenant invasion of Cote d'Azur is complete, the majority of the planet becoming their domain to do as they wish. For humans here, this is a near apocalypse, but for the Kig'Yar sniper Jaeg sa'Ral, this is just routine. But what he finds in a small, albeit resplendent, cottage outside the city line will change his life and his outlook on life forever...

Feathers

****Author's Note:** I'm still alive and kicking! Just weakly. I've been taking break cause I've been really busy, but I'm back! This was supposed to be a one-shot, but got too long. Read and enjoy! But, nonetheless, enjoy your foray into the mind of the Kig'Yar, Jaeg sa'Ral, and his date with destinyâ€|**

****DISCLAIMER:** I don't own Halo. A shame really. What shouldn't be stolen is the characters, plot, and ideas. If you really want something, the best thing to do is just to ask...**

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><p>Pronunciation:<p>

Jaeg sa'Ral: (Jay-gh, suh-RALL)

Elizabeth "Zabell" Ieorden (Eee-lie-ZA-beth, ZAE-bull, Lee-or-den)

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><p>Feathers, Part 1:

Sigma Octanus IV, Roughly 2552, Cote d'Azur, just outside the city line.

The Covenant patrol crashed through the underbrush of the dense jungle, creating such a ruckus that Jaeg sa'Raal was nearly forced to

shield his ears from the sound. They had been marching about the outer perimeter of the city through this accursed jungle for half the last cycle, and most of the Uggnoy under sa'Ral's command had long ago since given up trying to keep silent in the near-marsh of the foliage, and him long ago since given up ordering them to do so. Nearly all the living quarters of the Unclean had been ravaged, their hiding places searched, so few enough of the filthy creatures remained, and even less of those able to fight; none had been sighted in over a quarter cycle. Nonetheless, the Prophet's will was that of extermination, and so extermination was their holy duty.

Again, the sound of the noisy foot soldiers annoyed the already testy Jackal. After hearing the same sounds of stomping feet and high pitched barks for such a duration of time, one can only begin to understand the annoyance felt by Jaeg sa'Raal. Though such action was irrational, he grumbled to himself that if they didn't quiet down by the time he reached that reddish bush up ahead, he was going to shoot one of the obnoxious creatures in the back with his beam rifle. Maybe that would finally get them to shut up. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a patch of brown amongst the dark green of the jungle.

He twisted sharply, clawed hand whipping out a plasma pistol from the pair at his waist. He relaxed slightly, finding it only to be one of the human dwellings, a shack by comparison to the larger buildings in the city, though the family living there was obviously of some wealth. He had actually already searched the building himself much earlier in the day, and recognized it now. He now paid it no mind, nearly actually passing it by without action, then caught himself. Not just a human dwelling, but an escape, a way out of the annoying lines of the patrol.

He grinned, slightly, or what passed for such on his avian face.

"Continue the search, brothers. I will flush any Unclean from the area," He screeched.

The lead grunt, perhaps the only one of the bunch that he liked, protested sharply. "Shouldn't we send someone with you?"

Thinking quickly, Jaeg deflected the line of thought, "No, to do so would only further slow our patrol, and hamper the will of the Prophets. For the prosperity of our hunt, I will go alone, and return to the patrol when the task is complete."

Mabb, the grunt, shrugged, and waved the patrol forward. He was the only one of the lot still keeping silent. _Smart he may be, but he's not the brightest weapon in the armory._

He moved purposefully, long smooth strides moving him quickly towards the house, though he slowed as the patrol faded around the corner, foliage obstructing them from his view. The talons on his feet clicked slightly as he crossed the flat, grey expanse used for transportation by the humans. He didn't bother to draw his weaponry; he had swept the dwelling for Unclean presences himself, but hadn't told anyone of the place, knowing they would defile its contents.

He pushed aside the door, which hung on one, bent, hinge. The old wooden door creaked, permitting more sunlight to fall upon the room within, illuminating sheets of dust hanging in the air; the airborne

particles irritated his nostrils. He huffed, blowing the offending particles away in a cloud. A great expansive sigh escaped his beak-like maw, relishing the silence and peace of the moment. He stretched, muscles in his thin arms tensing and loosening.

The Kig-Yar sniper strolled, basking in the beauty of the moment, the beauty of the human-built structure about him. The elegance of it, the spiraling staircases that swept about the circumference of the room, the flourish of their banisters, carved in the likeness of vines. The simple calming coolness of the walls, offset artfully by the placements of portraits and depictions of the native beauty of the planet's jungles, was utterly intoxicating. He thrummed low in his throat, the vibrations making the spiny feathers running the crest of his head vibrate, sending a multicolor of hues rippling across their individual lengths, becoming a part of the greater grandeur of the room.

He quieted, taking a slow, deep, breath, still marveling in the sheer mastery of such base elements as were present in the chamber. He mounted the steps, taking the steps two at time, unable to even imagine anything that could rival the artistry of the main hall. Eagerly anticipating such design in the inner rooms as was in the antechamber, he pushed open an interior doorway. His gaze found no flowering wall mounts, no fluted candelabra, but, instead, he found a girl.

The sniper's trained eyes found her immediately, clothing ripped and tattered, face dirty, eyes wide in fear, hands grasping the meager provisions she had scavenged from the abandoned home. In a flash, his weapons were out, dual plasma pistols firing directly into where she stood, where she had stood. The Unclean female completed her roll, springing to her feet and dashing for a side entrance.

He darted back out the way he came, bringing his pistols back to bear on her fleeing form, firing accurately and rapidly. She turned a corner before his well aimed shots could connect, and he was forced to give chase, the soft light of his weapons pushing the shadow back from around him. He rounded the corner, and was surprised when he hit a dead end hallway, yet he was smug nonetheless.

Doubtless she is trapped, nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. Though she was not within sight, only a single doorway lined the hall, and the telltale sound of her breath to lead the way before it regardless. He held one clawed hand just above his head, overcharging the already-deadly pistol to incredible proportions, giving off a strong, eerie, green glow. With the other, he fired a bolt of the green plasma into the joints of the door, literally blasting it off its hinges. He stepped aside, allowing the door to fall outward, overcharged pistol coming to bear upon the female inside. He took a moment to examine the fledgling, knowing that his prey would be unable to escape.

Beyond the demolished doorway, lay a curled form, skin showing a sickly green in the glow of his weaponry. She had curled into a ball in the rear of the closet, head placed between her knees, eyes clenched tightly shut. She sobbed softly, tears dripping to the ground, the scent of them sweet in his predator's mindset.

He smiled, or rather, once again, showed what passed as a smile, for today he not only was free of the monotony of the patrol and was able

to revisit the grand hall he had found, but also got to have a bit of sport. He waited, knowing the human would eventually look up, waited, and anticipating the sweetness of that look of fear, the terrible and utter knowledge of one's own death. The woman, a girl really, slowly raised her head, eyes open; tears rimming her eyes shining in the light of the plasma. Her eyes riveted him, freezing him and insisting, demanding, his attention.

Her eyes. They were a beautiful green color, like the brightest and purest emerald, and shone as if in the light of day. The fear he saw there, the anticipated and awaited horror, that which he had so recently salivated over, sickened him. The emotion lay like a slick of oil over those wonderful, beautiful, eyes. Eyes, he realized, not too far apart from his own. His fingers twitched, instincts telling him to fire, release the pent up charge within the weapon, finish the deed and continue on his way, enjoying the moments of silence and the exquisite, alien, architecture.

He urged himself to just be done with the thing; to leave her alive was heresy, to look into her eyes was to court infidelity to his faith, consider her beauty was to endanger the Great Journey. Yet he could not bring himself to extinguish the life from those marvelous, incredible eyes. He fingered the safety on his pistols idly, considering his options. Well, he could kill her, that was the obvious choice; he could eat her if he was feeling famished, though he had just eaten quite recently; or he could just let her go. There really was nothing she could do, nowhere else she could go. The prophet's legions did control the whole planet after all..

Well, he supposed he didn't need to kill her. Why waste the time and effort it would take to kill her?

He shrugged, discharged his pistols into the air, and walked away.

* * *

><p>He left several minutes later stepping in the sunlight outside. Even though the jungle's thick foliage obstructed much of the sunlight, it was still bright when compared to the dank, dark dampness of the interior of the human structure. He walked away from it for the second time in as many days, leaving yet another piece of art untended inside. A voice seemed to whisper to him from inside his mind. If the art is so unattended, then why don't you take it with you?...<p>

Why would I want to take it with me? The "art" is nothing more than a human girl!_ And yet, the prospect teased him, as might a ripe apple just out of reach tease a bear cub. The thought tempted him, nagging at his subconscious desires. Why does she allure me so? Perhaps I am hungry... no thats not it... then what?! He cared not for her safety or wellbeing, he told himself. Perhaps, she is a gift of some sort from the Forerunners, a beauty placed within her that only they could have created. Perhaps that was it... but why would the Forerunners choose a human, of all beings?!

He snarled. Why could this female not leave him alone?! He had allowed her to live, and now she filled his head with poisonous thoughts!_ I will go back and finish her..._ He nodded grimly, spinning about. His quick deliberate steps, so different than those that had carried him here previously took him back through the broad

doors of the antechamber with a near reckless abandon. He climbed the twisting staircases, for the first time paying not a bit of attention to the majesty of the chamber. He had a higher goal in mind. He tramped through the hallways, till he reached the dead-end hallway he had left only minutes ago.

She still lay curled where he had left her, some of her dread replaced with confusion, but fear and trepidation held her still, unable to move. Again, he found himself unable to pull the trigger, unable to finish his task._ Fine. If I cannot be rid of her in my head, than I will keep an eye on her in body. I will take her away, perhaps to someone who will do what I cannot._ His visage hardened, set upon his task now. He motioned her out of the closet, making a shooin' motion with his hands.

Quickly tiring of the game of charades, he screeched, "Out, human!" The girl flinched at the piercing sound, huddling farther into the corner, if that were even really possible. He mentally berated himself, acknowledging the ridiculousness of the action. Of course she wouldn't understand.

Grunting to clear his throat, he produced a growling, scratchy, and nearly unintelligible version of human English. Apparently it still wasn't passable, as the girl's confusion was merely added to her fear. He tried again, speaking slowly; the odd speech wasn't meant for the beak-like maw of the Kig'Yar.

"Pleeeasee, come outttt?"

The girls eyes opened in surprise, then narrowed again in suspicion, she vocalized, saying what took Jaeg a moment to decipher as 'why should I trust you?'. Quirking the ridge above his eye line, he chuckled, the sound closely resembling that of some of the native birds of the planet would make.

"Whaaat ottttheer cchhhoiccce doo you have?"

She waited for several moments, Jaeg crouching down at the entrance, just below her eye level. Eyes still narrowed, the human female wiped the tears from her eyes and rose, holding a small burn mark on her arm, just above her right elbow. She took a small step towards him, hesitant, then another. Jaeg was sure to keep his posture as "nonthreatening" as possible. For a Jackal, that meant not holding a weapon, and not screeching war cries. Becoming more approximated to her speech, if only slightly, he was better able to understand her when she spoke again.

"Why didn't you kill me?"

"Peerhaaps I likkke you more tthhhan ottthhers."

She snorted, obviously not convinced with his answer, but she wasn't one to pass up an escape when she was offered one. She's a smart one.

"Soooo," she paused, thinking through her next statement, speaking slowly, "If you're not going to kill me, then what are you going to do with me?"

* * *

><p>The alien walked in front of her, stealthily and easily navigating the underbrush of the jungle terrain, like one of those ancient Earth reptiles, what were they? Dinosaurs! That's what it reminded her of. But no matter how alike that alien might look to the unintelligent reptiles and birds of her native planet, this creature was much smarter, just as vicious, and, with those plasma weapons of theirs, they were far more dangerous.<p>

She didn't bother deceiving herself with falsehoods. The diminutive thing would only keep her alive as long as she was useful to it, whatever that use might be. She hadn't thought that much out yet. The alien slowed, holding up its hand to halt her movement. It made the characteristic screech of its species before apparently remembering that she had no idea what it was saying, and switched to its garbled English. The sharp sound of its voice was like nails on a chalkboard, grating on her ears and making her wince.

"Reeesst Cchhiild. Weee will sssttay here the nighttt."

Her eyebrows met in a line on her forehead, anger rising in her voice.

"I am not a child! I am fourteen!"

The alien snorted, likely with the same meaning that a human would imply with such an action, waving her objections away.

"I have ssseen adaultttss of your ssspeccciesss, you are yettt a juvvvinile, yesss?"

She harrumphed, folding her arms and sitting down in the darkening jungle. The alien crouched down on the ground of the small dip in the land where they had stopped and, while not a particularly defensible position, the gorge was hidden fairly well. It was almost as if the alien didn't want to be found. Understandable, yet what was there to hide from? The Covenant forces occupied almost the whole of the planet, no significant forces of UNSC troops remained to be of any resistance. The longer she thought of it, the more she wanted to ask. Her alien captor crouched on the ground opposite her, sharp eyes scrutinizing her.

She put herself off, delaying, shifting where she sat in order to find a more comfortable position, and finally working up enough courage to speak up.

"Alien," she paused to take a breath.

Her captor veritably hissed, outraged at being addressed so. It spoke deliberately, and slowly, as if loathed to give up even this secret.

"III aaamm callllled Jaeg, huuuman"

"Fine. Jaeg. And my name isn't 'human'. It's Zabell"

The alien, Jaeg, spoke slowly, as if tasting the word, "Sayybllee?"

She sighed, her anger replaced with sobering melancholy. She smiled

weakly, speaking in a soft, quiet voice, "Yeah. That's close enoughâ€|"

The alien left it at that, returning to watching and listening to the forest around them.

She was worried for her parents; she hadn't seen her parents since they had gone out for dinner, the Covenant arriving before they returned. They had had a reservation at a very expensive restaurant in Cote d'Azure. The whole of the city was occupied by the Covenant. There wasn't even any resistance left. She had been smart, staying out of her home and hiding in the woods around her house. She had waited as long as she could, but eventually she still had to go back for food and clothes, and the Jackal had found her there.

Remembering their encounter, she checked her burn, a singe mark where she had been shot by him. The alien had a good eye, which wasn't surprising, noting his heritage. Taking a closer look, she sized him up. He had grayish-tan, pebbly skin, with fronds of sharp, spiny feathers on the crest of his head and down half his spine, shorter ones on his elbows and the back of forearms. The feathers were the same tan color that his skin was, though it was marginally darker and shone in the moonlight. He quirked his head in her direction, watching her out of the corner of his eye.

Eyes like hers. And yet not like hers. They were the same shape, color, hue, size, virtually everything! The one thing they lacked, was what she had yet to see in any species except humans. Compassion. She held not a doubt that this thing held no love or empathy for her.

The more she thought about it, the more reality seemed to close in around her. She wasn't going to be able to weasel her way out of this. She could run, but the alien would just catch her, or she would be found by another one, one who would just kill her without preamble. She couldn't charm the alien, she couldn't talk it out of its course of action. She was going to die. This wasn't like being caught skipping class, or getting a tattoo, _She was going to die. I don't want to die._

The realization hit her like a blunt punch to the face. She knew this already, had always known it, but had never been in a situation where any alternative had ever been possible. Now it looked like there was going to be no choice, nothing she could do to change what would happen. The knowledge of her life's end seemed to weigh down on her, crushing her. Zabell felt tears begin well in her eyes. _No! I will NOT cry. I will- I will not- I will not cryâ€|_

* * *

><p>Jaeg watched the human girl from the other side of the hollow, fixated on her form. She lay on her side facing away from him. She had been like this for several minutes now, tears dripping to the ground where they were absorbed into the wet soil.<p>

He had no idea what to do. He had no idea if he should do anything at all. But something inside him told him to go over to her, to comfort her, to make her cease her crying. To make her smile. _Why? Why do I want to? Why should I want to? I should enjoy seeing her suffer, she

is unholy! She opposes the Great Journey_! But despite his words, his proclamations and condemnations, he just couldn't mentally apply the words to her.

Snarling, he twisted away from her, disgusted with himself. _I cannot bring myself to kill her, but I will not comfort her! I have disgraced my people and my religion enough for a time, I think..._

* * *

><p>Author's Note: This won't be a series, nothing more than two parts, sorry if I got your hopes up. I really don't know when the next part will be up, sometime soon, I hope. But maybe not. Thanks to a good friend of mine for helping me with some of the plot lines and names. You know who you are, and I really shouldn't need to say more. Read, Review, and most of all, Enjoy! Flames will be used to kindle a fire of compassion in Jaeg's heart...

End
file.